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Dissertation Abstract: "Network Literacy: Community/Identity, Narrativity and Social Presence in Mom Blogs."

In composition curricula, the role of technology in the writing classroom is still uncertain. Writing technology and its ongoing reiterations often becomes fashionable as particular tools gain widespread attention (like the MUD and MOO movement of the early 90s), but then much like passing trends, is left once the novelty wears off and challenges arise. This dissertation studies a particularly fashionable (but also enduring) writing technology—blogs—and through content analysis, works to define the rhetorical strategies persistent in these environments as well as capture the motivations and cognitive processes in the construction and maintenance of such writing. The content analysis of one blogging community's writing (mom bloggers) reveals patterns in rhetorical practices concerning the construction of identity and community, required narrativity, and evident social presence. These three issues affirm what much of existing scholarship on teaching composition have already argued, and give us much to consider in rethinking the conventional writing classroom. The resulting argument is not that technology be the focus of the writing classroom (nor that each writing classroom use a particular technology, either), but instead that we can learn from writers using particular tools how to better engage our own students, whether we explicitly use or examine writing technology or not.

Chapter 1: Technology in the Writing Classroom: Then, and Then, and Then, and Now.

In this chapter, I first offer a history of how technology has been taken up in the writing classroom and in composition scholarship. I construct a timeline for the history of technology use in the writing classroom by reviewing and mapping major movements in articles from *Computers and Composition*, 1983-2006. Then I provide a review of current research on digital literacies, including work by composition and rhetoric scholars such as Greg Ulmer, Stuart Selber, Jeff Rice, Geoffrey Sirc, Cynthia Selfe, and Gail Hawisher.

Chapter 2: Working Up a Method for Blog Analysis

In this chapter, I first summarize a selection of recent research that involves the analysis of weblogs to understand emergent methods for studying them. This section focuses largely on the project *Into the Blogosphere*, an online collection of work that examines the discourse of weblogs from a range of multidisciplinary approaches. It includes work from, among others, Charles Lowe, Susan Herring, Carolyn Miller, Trish Roberts-Miller, and Torill Elvira Mortensen. Then I provide an argument for the multidisciplinary method I've established for this project, which includes network theory and social network theory, actor-network-theory, and content analysis.

Chapter 3: Web 2.0: Web Rhetoric-as-Epistemic

This chapter includes a presentation of the data, which reveal three major categories of rhetorical modes in the mom blogs: narrative, epistolary, and inventory. The emergence of these modes provides a framework for my argument that Web 2.0 is a model for rhetoric-as-epistemic. I draw heavily on the work of social media theorists like Tim O'Reilly, Stowe Boyd, and Cory Doctorow, as well as scholars such as Robert L. Scott, Richard McKeon, and James Berlin.

Chapter 4: Required Narrativity

Jill Walker Rettberg coined the phrase “required narrativity” in 2004: “[p]erhaps blogs require a narrative of change,” one that tells the writer’s story of who she is—even when the story is implicit. In this chapter, I review narrative theory (also called narratology, the narrative paradigm, and just plain narrativity) and argue that what compels writers and readers stems from the potential for the structure of the narrative to confirm, shape, or alter one’s sense of self. This chapter includes sections on intimacy, sympathy, interpellation, and identification. I then return to the coding data to show how each of these components exists in the blogs I analyzed.

Chapter 5: Social Presence in Writing/the Writing Classroom: Social = Me

This concluding chapter attempts to marry the frameworks of Web 2.0, rhetoric-as-epistemic, and narrativity to argue for a pedagogy that emphasizes social presence in writing. This social presence is made of intimacy and immediacy, which typically describe modes of physical interaction during communication. My claim is that the paradigm of Web 2.0 supports a textual social presence that the mom bloggers implicitly exhibit in their dual roles as readers/writers, and that to engage in such interaction is to be network literate. This model of network literacy can inform pedagogy by providing further support to the argument that writing is social and that social interaction begins with the individual writer.